

U.S. Student Visa Procedures

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Springtime signals the season to start planning travel for fall studies. For the third year in a row, students of Indian origin represent the largest full-time foreign student population in the United States. In the 2003-04 academic year, 79,736 students from India were studying as undergraduates and graduates in American universities and colleges. There are more than 3,600 accredited colleges and universities in the United States, some of them among the oldest and most prestigious in the world. In the United States, Indian students can find a flexible, diverse and high quality education that is student friendly and offers the chance for hands-on training. American universities welcome the difference in perspectives,

culture and opinions that international students bring to campus.

In the past, there have been certain misperceptions about student visas—that there was a quota on student visas or that, post 9/11, it was more difficult to get a student visa to the United States. These are simply not true. Anyone who is qualified for a student visa will receive a visa and the basic criteria for who is eligible have not changed. The U.S. visa policy is based on the principle of “Secure borders, Open doors.” And although the events of 9/11 have required us to take additional precautions to protect American citizens and foreigners working and studying in the United States, we are

working hard to ensure that all qualified students gain access to an American education in a timely manner.

To enhance security, some additional steps have been added to the visa process, including the Student and Exchange Visitor

Information System (SEVIS), personal interviews and fingerprinting. These changes have now been seamlessly integrated into the visa application process and help ensure the quick processing of bona fide students.

The American Embassy in New Delhi and the Consulates in Chennai, Mumbai and Calcutta are working hard to see that students gain their visa interviews in time for the fall semester. □

When making an Appointment for a student visa:

- First-time students should schedule their visa interviews as early as possible, but ideally not more than 90 days before the school's start date.
- First-time students cannot enter the United States more than 30 days before their start date. Continuing students with a valid visa can return at any time.
- Students can request an emergency appointment if they are unable to schedule an interview in time to attend school.
- Students with more than two U.S. visa refusals within the past six months cannot apply for an emergency appointment, but may schedule a regular appointment online when one is available.
- Students studying in high-tech or sensitive fields should apply early, as some applications may require an additional three to four weeks of processing.

Student Visa Applicants should:

- Make an appointment in the appropriate consular district. Applicants in the New Delhi, Chennai and Calcutta districts should apply online at www.TTSVisas.com. Applicants in the Mumbai district should apply online at www.visa-services.com.
- Complete application forms DS-156 and DS-158 (and DS-157 if required).
- Have a visa photo taken and obtain a demand draft for the application fee in the amount of Rs. 4,400. No issuance fees are required for student visas.
- Pay the \$100 SEVIS fee by credit card or draft according to instructions at www.fmjfee.com. (SEVIS is a one-time fee, as long as the student is continually in status while in the United States.)
- Appear for the interview at the appointed date and time and be sure to bring student's passport, SEVIS-generated I-20 form, evidence of ability to pay for the education, and any relevant academic information.
- Be ready, during the interview, to convince the consular officer that the applicant is a credible student, able to pay for the planned course of study and has a credible plan to return to India.

For further information on **student visas** or other **consular issues**, refer to the U.S. Department of State Bureau of Consular Affairs Web site at travel.state.gov/visa_services.html.

For information on **educational opportunities in the United States**, refer to the U.S. Educational Foundation in India (USEFI) Web site at www.fulbright-india.org.